Who's in Charge Here, Anyway?

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North Carolina Essential Standards for Social Studies

- 4.H.1.3 Explain how people, events and developments brought about changes to communities in various regions of North Carolina.
- 8.H.2.1 Explain the impact of economic, political, social, and military conflicts on the development of North Carolina and the United States.
- 8.H.2.2. Summarize how leadership and citizen actions influenced the outcome of key conflicts in North Carolina…
- 8.H.3.3. Explain how individuals and groups have influenced economic, political and social change in North Carolina and the United States.

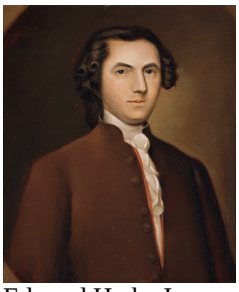
Early North Carolina could be described as a chaotic place. Part of the problem was that no such thing as "North Carolina" existed—at least officially—in the 1600s. North Carolina was equal parts "southern Virginia" (where many of its early inhabitants came from) and "northern Carolina" (since it technically was governed from far-off Charles Town, or modern-day Charleston, South Carolina). But since so many people lived in the Albemarle Sound region, the London-based Lords Proprietors decided to appoint a special governor. These wealthy men had been granted the vast colonial territory of Carolina by England's King Charles II. Their decision was supposed to make it easier to control the northern part of Carolina. Many of the early governors, however, proved to be unreliable, unlucky, or just plain corrupt.

Between 1664 and 1711, 16 different men held the title of governor of Albemarle (until 1689) or deputy governor of the Carolina province (between 1689 and 1711). Few governors lasted very long on the job. Many were removed from office by violence and rebellion.

John Jenkins, for example, became the fourth governor of Albemarle in 1672. Jenkins was popular with a faction of colonists who did not want to pay taxes on the export of tobacco, even though the Proprietors and the English government insisted that they do so. Thomas Miller and Thomas Eastchurch supported the Proprietors and sailed to England to complain. The Proprietors then appointed Eastchurch to be governor and Miller to be the new tax collector. Because Eastchurch got stuck in England, though, Miller became acting governor. In 1677, in an event that came to be known as Culpeper's Rebellion, unhappy locals arrested Miller and took over the government. In 1676 and 1677, nobody knew for sure if Jenkins, Miller, or Eastchurch was really in charge of the colony.

Seth Sothel was supposed to solve these problems. Things did not work out so well for him. Sothel became a Proprietor himself in 1677 and was appointed governor of Albemarle in late

1678. Part of his job was to resolve the issues that arose from Culpeper's Rebellion, but during Sothel's voyage to America, his ship was captured by North African pirates. The pirates held Sothel for ransom before he eventually made it back to England in 1681. Not until 1682 did he reach Albemarle. After he arrived, the inhabitants there accused Sothel of corruption and criminal misrule. Colonists claimed that the governor arrested his political opponents, stole from his business competitors, and monopolized trade with American Indians. He even seized the property of an orphaned child. In 1689 Sothel was arrested, tried, and banished from Carolina.


Edward Hyde. Image courtesy of the North Carolina Museum of History.

The power struggles between rival factions continued. Early in the next century, Thomas Cary, Edward Hyde, and William Glover fought to control North Carolina. In events that came to be known as Cary's Rebellion, Cary chased Glover out of the colony in 1708, claiming to represent the interests of religious dissenters, or those outside the Anglican Church—mainly Quakers. Three years later, Hyde arrived in the colony with an appointment as the new deputy governor. He soon tried to arrest Cary. The two men led small forces against each other on land and sea. Eventually, Cary would be captured in Virginia and sent to England for trial, but he returned a free man in 1713.

There are many more stories about simmering tensions and struggles over political leadership. The conflicts did not end when North Carolina officially became a separate colony from South Carolina in 1712. In 1724, for example, Governor George Burrington insulted Chief Justice Christopher Gale in court. Burrington, known for physically intimidating his foes, later threatened to blow up Gale's house with gunpowder. Things began to stabilize a bit in 1729, when King George II bought shares from seven of the eight Lords Proprietors, and North Carolina became a royal colony. But "who's in charge" remained in dispute throughout the colonial years. See what else you can discover about such struggles!

**Dr. Michael Guasco served as conceptual editor for the spring 2012 issue of* Tar Heel Junior Historian*. At the time of this article's publication, he served as associate professor of history at Davidson College, teaching a variety of courses related to colonial American history. His publications are primarily concerned with the early history of slavery in the English Atlantic world.*